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CHRISTMAS GREENS,

By

ANNIE BELL REDD.

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DEDICATED

TO

THE STUDENTS' CLUB

OF

COLUMBUS, GA.

You ask me, friends, about Christmas greens.
You'd like to hear of the happy scenes
Of childhood's day,
When all the children so soundly slept
As old Kris down through the chimney crept
In wondrous way?

You'd like to hear how he crept around
So softly, slowly, so that no sound
Could reach the ear
Of little tots in their beds so snug,
And how he placed on the bright-hued rug
The gifts so dear?

If so, I'd paint you a picture bright
With Christmas greens, and too, a sight
Of other things.
One then I'd paint of the Christmas morn
When first we saw the new doll and horn
Kris always brings.

The legends, tho', you desire I'd tell,
Of holly, mistletoe, pine, and—well,
Just all things green
Which keep their verdure all through the year,
And banish thoughts of the winter drear.
'Tis this you mean.

So first, I'll speak of the mistletoe.
This plant, the Druids of old, we know,
Did sacred hold.
'Gainst poisons 'twas a sure antidote,
And evil spirits held quite remote,
So I've been told.

If found and plucked not too late in spring,
On sixth day's moon, 'twould not fail to bring
The greatest bliss.
And when 'twas found on the sacred oak,
The priests would call to them all the folk:
Not one would miss

The banquet grand and the beauteous sight
Of priests all clothed in pure vestments white,
While two would hold
The snowy cloth, upon which would fall
The plant thus cut in the sight of all,
With blade of gold.

Two milk-white heifers were then brought out,
And all the people would loudly shout
As they were slain.
This ritual over, the whole day long
The Druids feasted, and bards gave song
Of sweetest strain.

Another legend, perhaps, will show
We should not use fated mistletoe
When hearts are gay,
For 'twas with this that the Baldur good
Received his death-wound in Valhal's wood,
On festal day.

The story, tho', I must tell aright.
This god was told in a dream one night
Of danger nigh.
To other gods he then told his woe:
On their assistance, they let him know
He could rely.

His mother, Frigga, exacted oath
From fire, and water, the earth, and both
The snakes that charm,
And beasts that kill: in fact, ev'ry thing
On land or sea, that they'd never bring
To Baldur harm.

This done, he sometimes would stand quite still,
And let the gods cut or shoot at will,
And feared no blow.
Among the gods was old Loki vile,
Who pondered viciously all the while,
Just where to go

To learn the secret of how to kill
That god. In woman's garb he roamed 'till
He Frigga saw.
He asked if things had by her been led
To swear that Baldur they'd spare. She said
"It is the law.

"They promised all, save a shrub quite small.
Nearby Vahalla it grows. We call
It mistletoe.
It seemed so harmless, so tender, young,
I claimed no promise from it, as't swung
On trees below."

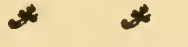
Then Loki left her; his heart was light;
His hopes were high, for he thought, "This night
Will Baldur die."
He went where gods with their darts and spears
In sport struck Baldur midst mirth and cheers
As sped they by.

He saw blind Hodur, who stood apart,
And asked why he had not hurled a dart.
"I cannot see:
And nothing have I which I can throw."
"Take this. I'll guide thy hand," said the foe
With chuckling glee.

'Gainst mistletoe, his life had no charm.
That only, could do the hero harm.
And soon it sped
From Hodur's well-guided hand, and flew
To'ard Baldur; and, whilst pierced through and through,
The god fell—dead.

I'll gladly leave now this legend sad:
More gladly since 'tis a yuletide fad
In such a wise
To hang this plant so a lad might pass
Beneath the bough with a winsome lass
With sparkling eyes.

He must indeed, be obtuse—or shy,
If, doubting, ling'ring, he lets time fly
With mistletoe
O'erhead, (placed there for the lad's own sake)
And fails the coveted kiss to take.
Don't you think so?



The next in order is pine, I think,
Which mainly serves as connecting link
For other greens.
Much beauty it has, and yet no grace,
But still, it must ever have its place
Mid yuletide scenes.

'Tis one of Nature's most cherished trees:
She lets it thrive spite of frost and breeze
However cold.
And when she patches her leaves and vines,
She uses the needles that grow on pines,
Say stories old.

The Germans tell us a story old
Which makes the fir-tree the first place hold:
'Tis much like this:
Two little children one winter night
For supper had but a tiny bite.
The little miss

Drew near her brother and said, "A knock!"
He reached the door and undid the lock.
There stood a child.
With cold he shivered, and begged for food.
They brought him in, as good children would,
And then they smiled

To think what they had to give a guest.
Not much, in truth, but they gave the best
That they could find.
They slept on benches and let their bed
The stranger have. The poor child then said
"How very kind!"

Asleep they fell; but before 'twas long,
They heard a beautiful angel's song.
They looked, and oh,
They saw outside, a soft rosy light,
And children there robed in silver bright,
Who sang below:

"O Child, we greet Thee, bringing
Our harps to aid our singing.
Thou, holy Child, art sleeping
While we our watch are keeping.
Blest house wherein Thou lyest;
To heaven it is the nighest."

The children listened with great delight;
Were gazing still at th'enchanting sight
With joy untold,
When some slight noise made them look around:
The stranger child in the room they found,
In dress of gold.

"I am the Christ Child," he gently said.
"You thought me poor, you gave me your bed,
Your food. Behold!
Heaven's choicest blessings I give to you;—
Both health and wealth, and contentment, too."
A fir-tree bold

Grew near the house; and from this, he broke
A twig and planted it. Then he spoke
To them once more.
"A tree shall this be, and bring to you
Each year new fruit." Then he vanished through
The open door.

The twig became a large Christmas tree;
And while the children sang loud with glee,
And danced with joy,
They found apples there of purest gold,
And silver nuts, too. This tale I've told
With some alloy.

A riddle now, I give you to guess,
And risk your thinking I shouldn't digress;—
That 'tisn't quite nice.
What can be green as the greenest pine,
Yet bright a red as a sunset fine,
And smooth as ice?

The holly! beautiful, bright, and gay.
We cast our sadness and woes away
When holly smiles.
With leaves so green, and its berries bright,
While hearts and homes teem with life and light,
It time beguiles.

You'd like to know how it won its fame?
How 'twas that it the tree-queen became
On Christmas day?
I've heard that once no bright berries grew
Beside its leaves of a dark green hue.
Some one did say

That Christmas morn long, long years ago,
A child was dancing along, when lo!
A moan, a whine
From bushes nigh! She approached and found
A Bunny caught in sharp holly: bound
As though with twine.

Midst thorns she thrust her soft little hand;
Not once she heeded, you understand,
The pain they caused.
She set him free, and away he sped;
Not e'en a "Thank you," the fellow said.
'Twas then she paused.

Her hands were bleeding, and bruised, and torn.
She saw the holly, and, near the thorn
Close by a leaf,
Was what she thought just some berries red;
It proved to be the pure blood she'd shed
For Bun's relief.

And then she heard a sound strangely sweet.
A rich-toned organ it seemed, replete
With harmony.
She thought it came from above the tree,
But when she looked, she could nothing see.
"A charm!" thought she.

But no! a voice! "Pluck a spray, you'll find
That you have jewels; the rarest kind
That wealth e'er buys.
Your drops of blood to rich rubies turned;
And diamonds formed of the tears that burned
The Bunny's eyes."

She scarce believed that the words were true;
But sure, the drops which she thought were dew,
Were diamonds bright
As those Golconda sends out. And oh,
The carmine rubies there, were, we know,
Her heart's delight.

Soon flocked a crowd to the famous tree,
But found no gems; they could only see
Twigs, berries, leaves.
Such jewels were not thus formed for pelf,
But her alone, who fogetting self,
Distress relieves.

Among these stories that I have told,
You'll find some new, and the others old
As—as the hills.
Just tell them please to the children dear.
Perhaps they'll add to the season's cheer
When winter chills.

And now, I bring Christmas greeting, friends.
If each swift moment while fleeting, sends
A blessing bright
To each of you, why remember, dears,
To praise the one who has banished tears,—
Who hearts made light.

With Christmas greens you will dress your homes.
With them, weave thoughts of the love that comes
In darkest night;
The glorious love that hath brought the "Peace,
Good will to all," and will e'er increase
And Heav'n make bright.

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